



*"Committed to the protection and promotion of public health."*

## Gallatin City-County Health Department

### **Information Letter To Belgrade Parents Regarding Bacterial Meningitis**

On March 26<sup>th</sup>, Gallatin City-County Health Department learned that a 17-year-old Belgrade student was hospitalized with bacterial meningitis. The purpose of this letter is to inform you about this disease and how it is spread, treated and prevented. In addition, it is important that you know what the school and Gallatin City-County Health Department is doing to prevent future cases. This is the second case of this type of bacterial meningitis reported in Gallatin County within the past month. The first case was an MSU student. At this time, the cases do not appear to be connected to one another. Sporadic cases of this type of meningitis are typically reported during the late winter and early spring months. Montana has about 3 to 5 cases per year. Since these two cases are unrelated it is not considered an outbreak at this time.

### **WHAT IS BACTERIAL MENINGITIS**

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid around the brain and spinal cord. It is a serious and sometime fatal disease. This type of bacterial meningitis is spread when a person comes in contact with the saliva of an infected person. Although this type of meningitis can be a very serious disease that can cause brain damage and death, it is not easily transmitted from one person to another. It requires close contact with the person who is ill. It is treated with antibiotics.

### **SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF MENINGITIS**

If the rapid onset of the following symptoms develops, you should see your health care provider immediately:

- High fever
- Severe headache
- Sensitivity to light
- Stiff neck
- Nausea and vomiting
- Rash
- Fatigue

### **WHAT IS BEING DONE**

#### **Management of Close Contacts**

The following are considered to be close contacts: household members or those who have been exposed directly to a patient's oral secretions through kissing or sharing items such as toothbrushes, water bottles or eating utensils. The Health Department is in the process of identifying this student's close contacts. Belgrade School administration, faculty and staff

have been assisting in the identification of the school close contacts. Close contacts are being called by Public Health Nurses and referred to their health care provider for preventive antibiotic treatment. This also includes students who have been vaccinated with meningococcal vaccine because the vaccine does not protect against all strains of bacteria that can cause meningitis.

#### Casual Contacts

Casual contact, such as eating in the same cafeteria or attending classes together, does not pose a risk and infectious disease experts do not recommend treatment for people with casual or random exposure. The bacteria are not transmitted by food handlers or through food. The bacteria cannot live outside the body for more than a few minutes so people are not infected by being in a room where an infected individual has been. Treatment of individuals who have had casual contact is not recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services or Gallatin City-County Health Department.

**Again, the Gallatin County Health Officials do not recommend widespread distribution of preventive antibiotic treatment related to this case. Preventive antibiotic treatment should be limited to close contacts only.**

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREVENT MENINGITIS

Meningitis is a vaccine-preventable disease. **Immunization of all Belgrade Students is not required at this time.** However, meningitis vaccination is routinely recommended for children at the ages of 11-12 years of age and older. Parents should check their children's immunization record to see if they have received the meningitis vaccine. Vaccination can be obtained from your health care provider or the Health Department by appointment.

### RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you have questions, the Gallatin City-County Health Department will be available to take phone calls on Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup> from 10am to 2pm or leave a message and a public health nurse will return your call over the weekend. Please call 582-3100 if questions.

The Gallatin City-County Health Department has posted information regarding meningitis on its website at <http://www.gallatin.mt.gov/health>.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides an FAQ about meningitis at <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/bacterial/faqs.htm>